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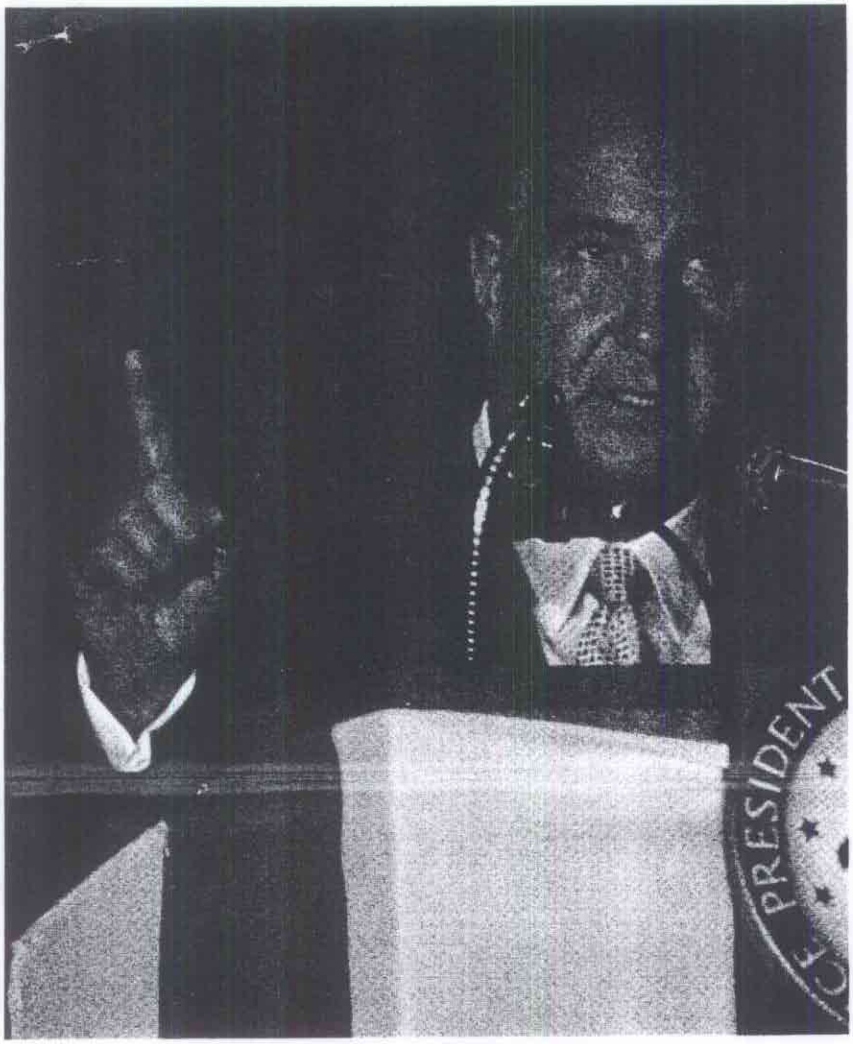
A tough off-year campaign to scalp 'radical liberals' everywhere

by BROCK BROWER



At a Republican rally in Minot, N. Dak. (above and at right), Agnew spoke in support of the U.S. Senate candidacy of Thomas S. Kleppe "because we know he will stand by the President on the great issues." Signs were as much for Agnew as for Kleppe.

At Salt Lake City, Utah (left), cheers from the crowd were mixed with shouts about the Vietnam war from a young but very loud group of protesters.

Agnew on the Warpath

The third week of the campaign he flew down to Memphis, Tenn. and named hard-pressed Democratic Senator Albert Gore to be "the Southern regional chairman of the Eastern Liberal Establishment." The next week he got out to Salt Lake City, Utah, where he decided that another in-trouble Democratic senator, Frank Moss, should be "the *Western* regional chairman of the Eastern Liberal Establishment." There are still two more regional chairmanships to fill, but three weeks of Vice President Spiro T. Agnew yet to go, and at Republican rallies all across the country, he is still giving his closest personal consideration to selected candidates from his purge list of that "awful radical liberal coalition" in Congress.

Whether or not this latest Agnew technique is working toward a Republican victory, it is once more pushing the Vice President up front of all other working politicians. His actual audiences may not always be electrified by his bland performance, but that is probably because they are sitting in the deliberately calm eye of an ever-moving political storm that has, so far, torn across 15 key states in four weeks. Even the Vice President seems a little startled at the havoc he has brought to traditional off-year campaigning. Referring to his unprecedented 90-minute TV confrontation with four college youths, he says, "Can you imagine during the time I was a student, my being invited to participate in . . . a radio show with Vice President Garner?"

But then again, can you imagine John Nance Garner, Franklin D. Roosevelt's Vice President, emerging as the most important political figure of the 1934 congressional elections? That is what is happening to Agnew as he swings wide and handsome across the U.S., trying to bring Middle America up from silence—and into the Republican party.

Hot rhetoric wouldn't melt in his mouth

They are all set now on camera, or almost, with less than two minutes to taping. The four local newsmen are nervously pawing the sides of their panel slots, and the director is going for a final voice level on the guest in this small Salt Lake City TV studio. It turns out the cord on the throat mike does need some adjusting. But not for the voice. Only for the tailoring, to take a single rumple out of those smooth, Big Daddy blue shoulders. But there isn't even that much wrinkle in the voice. There never is. Testing, testing. "I always talk about this level," says Vice President Spiro T. Agnew in his even, carefully lowered, perpetually unruffled manner, "except when my voice leaves me."

Does it ever? It seems to be with us everywhere these campaign days, middling and merciless, always ready to explain quite logically what "indices" damn yet another "radical liberal" senator to political perdition. At least once a week, some GOP candidate looks up for his routine endorsement, and finds Savonarola has rolled into town. Agnew's standard rally speech is hard text on one more deadly, and likely Democratic, sin, but always delivered in that same level, respectable, untuned voice. "As long as Richard Nixon is President, Main Street is not going to turn into Smut Alley," he rounds off a scathing paragraph, and yet, for all the passion shown, he could be reading from a Chinese fortune cookie.

"Hot rhetoric," hapless Senator Charles E. Goodell of New York charges. "Sophisticated McCarthyism." Poor, misguided, third-running Senator Goodell. In his panic at finding himself the first *Republican* to be impartially Agnewthematized as a "radiclib," he has lost whatever ear he may have had for subtleties. "Well, first of all, let me say I didn't read Senator Goodell out of the party," explains the Vice President, sitting right there under a statue of Justice with her scales. "He read himself out of the party by his conduct and his actions in the past year—maybe a little longer than that." Goodell opposed the President on the Vietnam war; hence, the process is inexorable. "Radiclibs" are simply where you find them, regardless of party, and the Vice President feels, above all else, he must be "consistent." Hot rhetoric wouldn't melt in his mouth. His voice—in contrast, in deliberate contrast to so many others around—is orchestrated to be, in 1970, the voice of reason.

That is even, incredibly enough, Spiro T. Agnew's street voice these days. He is into a hassle at Temple Square in Salt Lake City with some young demonstrators who are trying to drown

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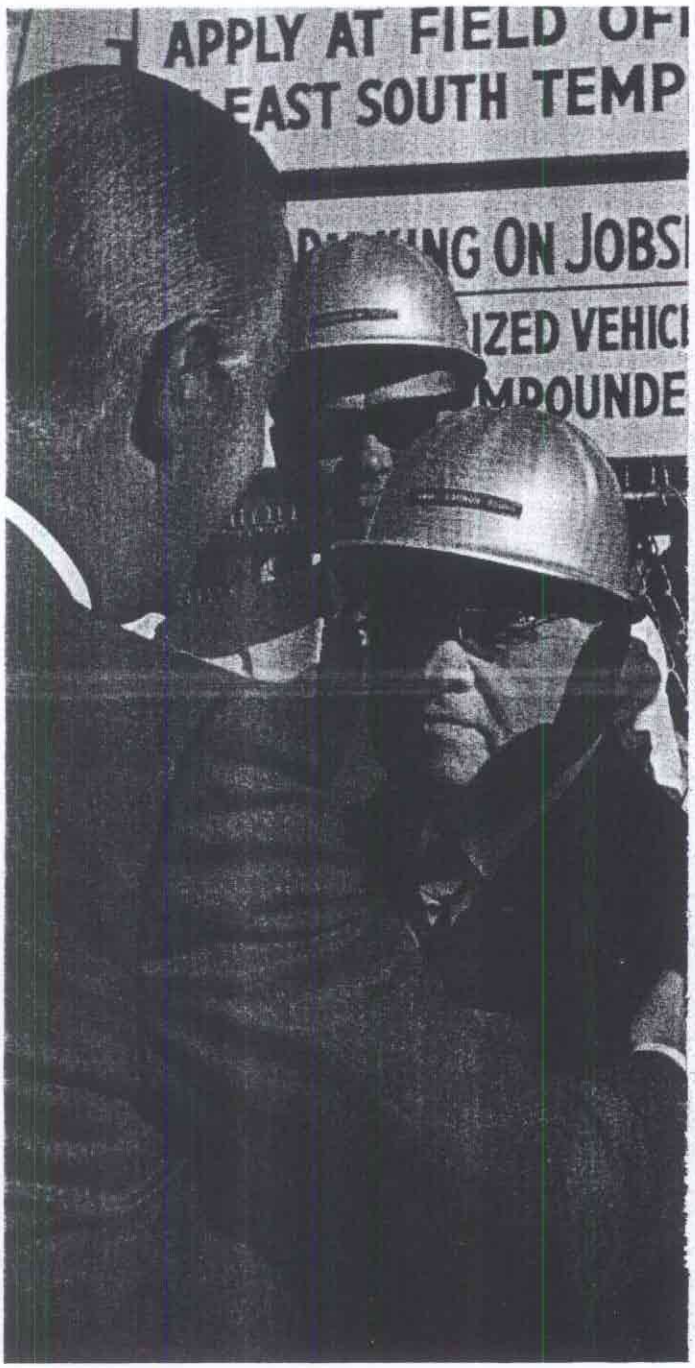
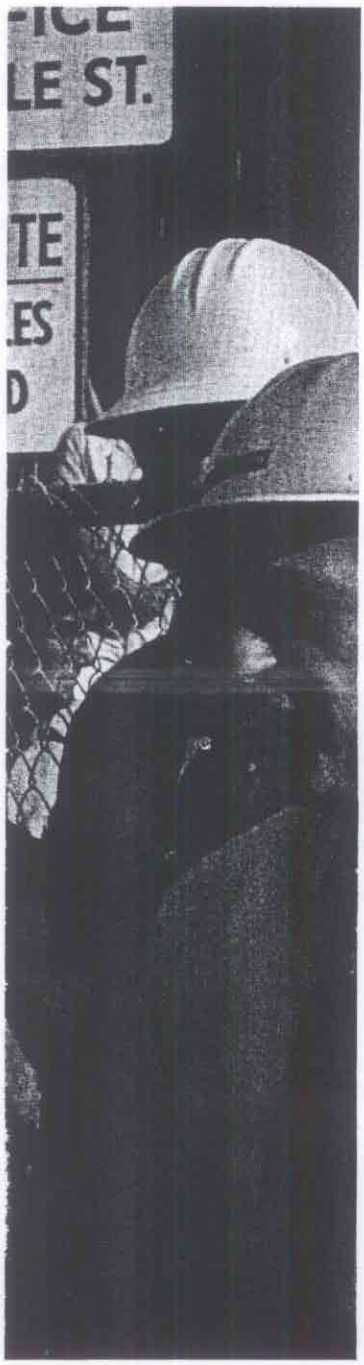


The Vice President breaks his fly-and-speak routine, pausing in Salt Lake to shake hands with hardhats.



Notes on a new style for Agnew

Out here in the land of seditious drivel and impudent snobs, I sometimes wonder how long the country will put up with the contumacious casuistry and fulminating fustian of a vizier of vice-presidential venom. It's not just that Americans' problems are too complex to be solved by the scurrilities of spiraling Spirocracy. It's also hat the material is getting stale.

How much more alliteration, for instance, can the republic stand? Mr. Agnew has already given us "pusillanimous pussyfooting," "vicars of vacillation," "nattering nabobs of negativism" and "hopeless, hysterial hypochondriacs of history." That pretty well shoots the formula—or, at the very least, the letters *p*, *v*, *n* and *h*.

But freshness cries out for new and unusual letters. *Q* begs to be used by Mr. Agnew—possibly for college presidents: querulous quarterbacks of quackery. And *z*, which he might apply to pornographers: zealous zombies of the erogenous zone. And *j*, an odd letter with a harsh sound, just right for his probable opinion of those jejune (antimotherhood) jezebels (bra-abolishers) of jiggery-pokery (male overthrow)—the ladies of Women's Lib.

But even with new letters the formula won't last much longer. Whole new linguistic shapes are needed—perhaps an excursion into meter and rhyme. As a start it would be easy for the Vice President to adapt the familiar verses of childhood.

Hickory, di kory dock,
A student smash:d a clock.
The little bum,
He learned it fi om
That specious Doctor Spock.

From there it would be a simple step into the cadences of some beloved American poet —John Greenleaf Whittier, say:

Curses on thee, teen-age tot,
Barefoot boy who reeks of pot,
With thy turned-up pantaloons,
Humming humdrum Beatle tunes. . . .

Then it's only a jump into the intricate rhythms of Edgar Allan Poe:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while the
draft board, weak and weary,
Queried many a timid, traitorous
truant of the Vietnam war,
While they nodded, nearly napping, suddenly
there came a rapping,
As of someone gently tapping,
wire-tapping at the door.
'Twas the FBI, thank God, they'll throw
those goons in jails galore,
Law and order—evermore!

WILLIAM K. ZINSSER

Agnew's speech at a Republican fund-raising dinner in Salt Lake didn't electrify all the partisans, as indicated by the tepid response of the lady at left. Neither did his words seem to move the Elders of the Mormon Church, above, when he paid a courtesy call.

Socking the 'Spock-marked generation'

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him out with "four-letter words as old as Chaucer," waving a Smash-Racist-Agnew-in-His-Racist-Mouth sign at him. The sound system goes up, and up—but not the voice—and he embarks on a few impromptu remarks to "my critics." He allows that "if you are sincere in your beliefs, you should have as much right to articulate them as I do," but, at the same time, "you are not exactly so young that you can be allowed to indulge in this constant temper tantrum that people of your type exhibit." *I.e.*, these are just kids, and he must speak to them for their own good.

"Please don't contribute to the Spock-marked generation." His two speechwriters, William Safire and Patrick Buchanan, look across at each other there in the Salt Lake City street. That yours? No, yours? No, must be his. "Please don't contribute to the kind of climate in this country that raised emotions beyond reason." That's right, *he* is asking *them* not to raise emotions beyond reason. "Listen, argue, debate, condemn where you must, but do it with your mind, not with your—" he hesitates a tiny beat, even ducks a little away from the microphone as he says what he's "got" to say "—butt."

By darn, a four-letter word. But one that any old-fashioned, right-thinking, un-Spock-marked parent might use, given sufficient provocation. Exactly the right spank word, and another bit of added smack to a campaign that for tactical surprise and political gall has not been seen since 1948 when Harry Truman Gave 'em Hell. Agnew has, in fact, already paid tribute to Truman on that score, quoting Truman's famous 1956 explanation: "I just tell the truth, and they think it's hell." But this year, for the Democrats, there is a special reverse irony in the situation. Spiro T. Agnew is giving them hell, and for some reason they seem to think it's the truth.

Has one lone man ever caused such rightward scuttling among liberals for centrist cover? Adlai E. Stevenson III, running for the Senate in Illinois, tries to forget he ever said the Chicago police were "storm troopers in blue"—a remark that Agnew is constantly helping him to recall—and puts the man who prosecuted the Chicago Eight on his staff. Senator Fritz Mondale, who sits in Hubert Humphrey's old seat from Minnesota, is suddenly talking about being the "true conservative" of our present society. The Democrats, to the surprised delight of one Agnew aide, have "shown an utter failure to get off the defensive." Maybe largely because the Vice President, under this guise of sweet reasonableness, has done nothing but blitz, blitz, blitz.

In fact, he will even, if need be, attack the products of Nixon's own administration, *e. g.*, the Scranton commission's report on student unrest. One Agnew aide referred to the silent way President Johnson bore implicit criticism of himself in the Kerner commission's report on racism. "It wasn't fair," the aide says, "but Johnson took it. We don't. We can go out and crack them." So when the Scranton commission had the nerve to call for greater moral leadership from the President, Agnew promptly cracked them for serving up "more Pablum for the permissivists," extolled Nixon's moral leadership sevenfold, kept raising his sword in the Colosseum until the thumbs turned down on the commission members.

Bloody work, but then the Vice President, according to his staff, remains "the most loyal of soldiers," and even though to be constantly on the attack is "not necessarily personally productive," it has done no harm to his greatest political asset, his credibility among Middle Americans. Those moral philippics are still invincibly him. "He gives us the sourdough," explains a speechwriter, "and we knead it." Lots of kneading. Everybody ends up with flour on his hands.

"Campaigning with the President is more rigid, Spartan-like. You're moving armies," says another staff man. "But the Vice President is less formal. Come on in, sit down, have a drink. I tell him a joke, then he tells me a joke . . ."

Contact with him, once over the isolation barriers, is indeed "immensely personal," and may take a man like Bryce Harlow, head of his campaign staff, right out to the SAC-base tennis courts in Minot, N. Dak. for a couple of sets between Dakota speeches. But, significantly, those sets are being played while the entire national press corps sit on their biases back at the motel, struggling to keep the already dim human figure of this highly fallible man from receding further from their daily copy.

Yet what few slips they do uncover turn out to be those that invariably redound so whackily to Agnew's credit with the silent majority. Senator Goodell, for instance, was inadvertently put over the side one day too soon. He was supposed to sink beneath the waves on a Thursday. But Wednesday, as carefully as Agnew avoided inquiring national reporters, he still got asked by a North Dakota commentator, who should have been thinking only of farm prices, about possible Republican "radiclibs." What to do? "Well, I'm not going to weasel about that question," he answered. "I'm going to forthrightly say that I would have to put one Republican senator who seeks reelection this year in that group. That is Senator Goodell." After all, what did one more day of political life for Goodell mean when set against Agnew's own reputation for always telling it straight? Too bad that the Republican national chairman happened that Wednesday to be up in New York with his arm around Goodell.

There have been rumblings within the staff about going even further. At least one man would like to see Agnew publicly—not just indirectly—support Goodell's Conservative party opponent, James L. Buckley. But the risks involved in openly backing a long shot like Buckley do finally bring into sharp focus the real limitations on even the Vice President's imposing political presence. Only Richard Nixon, of course, could ever give the order to bring Buckley aboard.

In fact, only Richard Nixon could decide to put a Goodell over the side, and did so just before he left for Europe. The Vice President may have built himself a constituency, which he more and more stubbornly defends. For instance, when challenged now for failure to "Bring Us Together," he answers: "I think I've succeeded in bringing together a silent majority of American people who were drifting aimlessly, wondering about their beliefs in the country." He is willing to leave aside "elements of our society that are counterproductive to our purposes," which include, at least for a start, "prisoners in jail . . . people in asylums . . . psychopaths . . . people whose way of life is violent antisocial conduct." There must be others. But what the building of that constituency has really done is to make him even more the President's imperious creature.

Nixon generously let Agnew pick any members of the White House staff he might want personally to help him on the campaign swing. He chose Harlow, Buchanan, Safire and Martin Anderson. They were all more than willing, volunteers even, but the point is they *are* the present Agnew staff. Without them, the Vice President would be almost alone on the airplane.

So he has his overriding duty to the President, which, for all Agnew's abrasive speechifying, is steadfastly to bespeak Republican orthodoxy. He does have his rabid followers. "Motherhood, Apple Pie, and Spiro" reads a pro-Agnew sign in Minot, N. Dak. But his own brand of extremism is really what has been called "extremism of the middle," and it serves as a message to all Republican officeholders to stay, if not within, at least close to centrist loyalty to Richard Nixon. That, in fact, whether his tactics win or lose in this off-year election, is the real import of the Agnew blitz.

"We're not saying it," says one staff man, "but from now on, no Republican can expect support in 1972 if he goes against the President on the big issues." That's what "radiclibs" do.

And since this is the Nixon administration, the strategy inevitably ends up being expressed in a sports image. Basketball this time. "There aren't going to be any more free throws," says an aide. "Somebody else is on the court." Number 2, Big Spiro, with a lot of height these days, ready to play it very rough under the basket. ■

Senator Goodell, with New York's Mayor Lindsay (left), was the first Republican Agnew called a "radiclib."

The Vice President relaxes for a moment in the Minot, N. Dak. TV studio after attacking Senator Goodell.